

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIXED-USE IN COLLEGE STATION

MARCH 2003

DRAFT



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**OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
IN COLLEGE STATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was initiated to analyze the opportunities for mixed-use development in College Station and the City's policies for encouraging this development pattern. A subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission met with City staff over three months to develop recommendations for the City's policies and Land Use Plan.

In recent decades, almost all of the City's growth has been suburban style single-use developments. The Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1997 included a mixed-use category on the Land Use Plan; however, the market has not produced mixed-use development. This has created some confusion and conflict as development requests, driven by the market, have been submitted for land designated for mixed-use on the Land Use Plan.

This study identifies a simple definition: Mixed-use development is the combination of different but compatible land uses within a single building, site, or district. It recognizes that there are a variety of mixed-use types and styles and that no one unique set of characteristics exist. It also emphasizes that some developments occur with a mix of uses in close proximity to each other, but not in a compatible or integrated manner that fits the true meaning of mixed-use.

Focusing on College Station, the study identifies three opportunities for mixed-use development that are likely to occur in College Station. The three types of mixed-use include Historic Mixed-use, Single-use Conversions, and Master Planned Developments. Historic Mixed-use is primarily the Northgate area, which developed in a mixed-use pattern before modern land use regulations. Single-use Conversions are the redevelopment or redesign of shopping centers and retail strip centers into mixed-use developments that accommodate pedestrians, integrate compatible uses and transition into surrounding neighborhoods. The third type is Master Planned Development, which is new development on larger undeveloped tracts of land. Not all Master Planned Developments may be mixed-use, but they provide the best opportunity for new mixed-use development.

It is unlikely that attempts to force mixed-use development through the Land Use Plan designations would be successful. In addition, there do not appear to be any areas in the City (with the exception of Northgate) where mixed-use is considered the only desirable development pattern. Therefore, mixed-

use is not an appropriate category for the Land Use Plan at this time. This does not mean that mixed-use development is not desirable or that it should not be allowed or encouraged. None of the three types of mixed-use development identified require a designation on the Land Use Plan to be implemented. Therefore, it is recommended that the City have a policy that allows for and encourages mixed-use development, but should not force it to occur in any specific location through the Land Use Plan. This means removing the mixed-use designation from the Land Use Plan, and replacing it with other designations that better represent the desired uses and development patterns.

The study also recommends that a new land use category called Planned Development be added to the Land Use Plan. This is to be used where larger areas of land may develop with a mix, or collection, of uses, but not necessarily a mixed-use pattern. The Planned Development category emphasizes the need to master plan the area to ensure appropriate placement of different uses. The recommendations in this study include proposed amendments to the Land Use Plan to replace mixed-use with other appropriate designations.

Background

In October 2002, staff initiated a study to investigate mixed-use development opportunities in College Station. A subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission was formed to direct this project.

The City's existing Land Use Plan includes a category for mixed-use development. However, the Comprehensive Plan provides little guidance on acceptable development patterns for these areas and implementation of the mixed-use concept. The result has caused uncertainty for developers, City staff and decision-makers.

This report presents information intended to

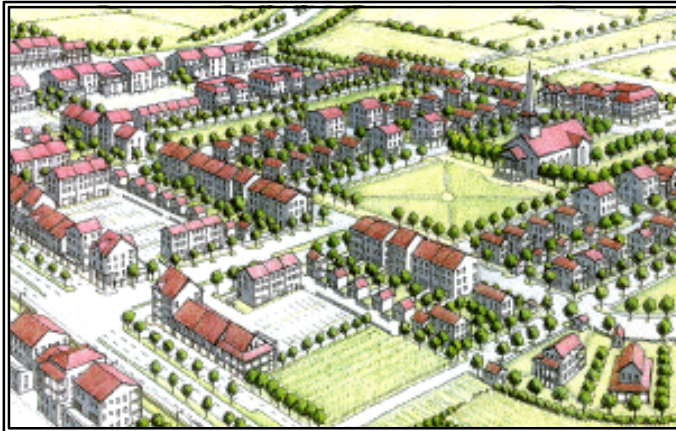
- Describe what mixed-use development is
- Identify forms of mixed use development appropriate for College Station
- Identify where such mixed use development may be appropriate
- Make recommendations for amending the Comprehensive Plan and other implementation methods that support mixed-use development

WHAT IS A MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT?

In its simplest form, *Mixed-use development is the combination of different but compatible land uses within a single building, site, or district.*



Mixed-use in a single building



Mixed-use district

In general, mixed-use development is designed to encourage a variety of community activities, locales and services to co-exist in close proximity, thereby improving efficiency of service delivery and reducing the need for extensive automobile travel. Mixed-use developments may occur vertically, such as multi-use buildings with retail over commercial, or horizontally, with differing uses built adjacent to and integrated with each other. It is contrary to common suburban development patterns where housing, retail, and employment centers are widely separated and intentionally buffered.

The College Station Comprehensive Plan defines Mixed Use as "areas which encourage mixing of compatible land uses such as retail/commercial, office,

parks, multifamily, and attached single-family. These uses are developed together in a manner that allows interaction between the uses and that allows each use to support the other uses. The success of these mixed use areas is directly related to the sensitive master planning of the site layout."

Mixed Use vs. Mix of Uses

It is important to point out that there is a significant difference between a mixed-use development and a large development or area that has a mix, or variety, of uses. The latter is development that includes housing, retail and office uses in the same proximity, but not integrated or designed to function together or benefit each other. This is typical of suburban development patterns and many master planned communities.



*Collection of single-use districts
(Mix of uses)*

vs.

Mixed-use district

This difference highlights the importance of urban design and form in successful mixed-use developments. The design and layout of a mixed-use development provides pedestrian mobility and safety, street connectivity, and functional compatibility.

"Perhaps the most important overall consideration in mixed use developments is design: architecture, physical and functional integration among buildings and uses, circulation, and relationships with adjacent land uses are crucial design features that must be carefully treated." - *Mixed Use Development Handbook*, ULI

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS IN COLLEGE STATION

This section reviews existing development in College Station to provide a context for discussing characteristics of mixed-use development.

Single-use Development

Over the past thirty years, large expanses of single-use development, unrelated to surrounding uses, have been constructed in College Station. Although some uses may be adjacent to other uses, their orientation, relationship to their neighbors, and urban design characteristics do not qualify them as mixed-use development. These developments often lack an interconnected street system or pedestrian access. A lack of connections to neighboring uses, often within walking distance, force the need to travel long distances by car to leave a single entrance development, access the main road, and make way to the neighboring use.



These pictures are typical examples of the development occurring in College Station today and in the recent past. The characteristics of these developments are generally a single-use such as a single-family subdivision or a strip commercial center, but rarely are they combined in a compatible manner. Prominent features include a limited number of neighborhood entrances, a lack of sidewalk connections to neighboring uses or from roadways to entrances, multiple commercial driveways, lack of public spaces, automobile orientation with parking often dominates the road frontage, and buffers between uses.

Mixed Use Development

Today, the only existing mixed-use development in College Station is the historic Northgate area. It is notable as an area exhibiting close proximity of differing uses with a compatible urban design. The uses are integrated in a way that encourages pedestrian activity and reduces the need for travel by automobile.

Mixed-use development in this area primarily takes the form of single or multi-family residential development in close proximity to nonresidential development. Residential uses adjacent to commercial uses are often compatible due to urban design features such as architectural design, intensity limits imposed by parcel sizes, or a historical need for pedestrian rather than automobile access. Of course, within this area there are also examples of typical single use development and poor urban design, unrelated to surrounding uses. Therefore, no one place in College Station demonstrates an ideal example of mixed-use development.

Concluding Remarks

New development occurring in College Station is not of a mixed-use nature. Neither is it designed or built in an integrated fashion with neighboring uses. The only mixed-use development pattern occurring in College Station is through the redevelopment of Northgate. The historic land use pattern in Northgate has emerged over time and did not result from current Comprehensive Plan policies, although current zoning and redevelopment goals have continued and encouraged this pattern. Throughout the community, some compatibility issues may be improved over time through the new Unified Development Code, but the predominance of parking and the separation of uses are likely to continue as standard design features under existing policies and regulations. Although the city does have mixed-use policy language in the Comprehensive Plan, it has not generally resulted in mixed-use developments.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT

The expansive nature of College Station's growth is not inherently conducive to the higher density development found in mixed-use. However, as College Station grows there will be opportunities to facilitate future mixed-use development through the Land Use Plan, growth policies and land development regulations. To accomplish this, there must be a consensus on what mixed-use types are appropriate for College Station, and where such developments should be located.

Mixed Use Development Possibilities

Staff has identified three types of mixed-use development that could occur in College Station: Historic Mixed Use, Single Use Conversions and Master Planned Developments. The following section presents these mixed-use development types.

Historic Mixed-use

Many communities around the country have been redeveloping their historic neighborhoods through Community Development programs, Main Street programs, or other efforts. Such areas are unique as they were built prior to modern single-use and auto oriented development patterns. They are identified by a close proximity of differing uses with a compatible urban design. The uses complement one another and allow for consolidation that encourages pedestrian activity and reduces the need for travel by automobile. The characteristics of these areas include dense sidewalk networks, a local grid street system, buildings oriented to the street instead of behind large areas of parking, and mixed-uses within single buildings.

Northgate is the principal area in College Station that matches this development pattern. The City has spent considerable time and resources developing and implementing the Northgate Redevelopment Plan. The Plan generally encourages a mix of residential, retail, and office with multiple uses within single buildings in the most areas. The Northgate area is currently shown as Redevelopment on the Land Use Plan.

Single Use Conversions

Mixed-use developments typically thrive best when located within the mostly developed cores of communities. Unfortunately, there is limited vacant land to accommodate such developments in these more dense areas. However, sprawling single-use developments in the form of strip malls and classic suburban shopping centers are plentiful there. An increasingly common means to accommodate mixed-use developments in these areas is to convert old strip malls or shopping centers into mixed-use developments, or to redesign them so that they accommodate both cars and pedestrians. Considerable research and professional planning has been targeted to this idea. The following figures portray how an old mall can be converted into a mixed-use development over time.



The conversion of single use shopping centers and retail strip centers increases the intensity of development on the site to accommodate a mix of uses and redesigns the site to increase pedestrian access and safety and to significantly improve the aesthetic transition between residential and non-residential uses. The mix of uses is often office, retail or service. However, residential uses are also sometimes part of the land use mix and can provide a permanent customer or employment base for the non-residential development. In addition to the larger shopping centers, smaller retail strip centers can be redeveloped in an innovative manner to integrate them into surrounding neighborhoods. The increased intensity created by converting commercial sites reduces the need to continue to convert undeveloped residential land to future commercial uses, thus increasing the value of land without extending additional infrastructure.

At present, most retail strip centers adjacent to residential development are laid out in a manner that lacks safe pedestrian access and, in many cases, residents are required to get on a major roadway to access convenience retail within sight of their home. The fronts of retail strip centers will still require plenty of parking and access from major roadways, but the rear and sides can be redesigned in such a manner as to provide pedestrian. Innovative urban design can provide a pleasant transition from residential to retail and/or office space.

There will be increasing opportunities for single-use conversions as College Station's aging shopping centers redevelopment. Those centers located closer to the core of the City and TAMU, and those adjacent to developed residential areas, will be best suited for this type conversion. Redevelopment proposals to date have been of a more traditional suburban design. Considerable education and incentives may be necessary to introduce this as an acceptable alternative form of redevelopment. No existing shopping centers are designated for mixed-use on the Land Use Plan.

Master Planned Developments

Master Planned Developments typically occur on large undeveloped tracts of land where the uses and overall layout for the area are designed in advance. They may include a variety or mix of uses. Sometimes they are simply designed as large-scale suburban style neighborhoods (the Crowley tract is an example). Other times they are designed as mixed-use villages, similar to the many popularized town center projects. So it is important to point out that a Master Planned Development is not necessarily a mixed-use development.

Master Planned Developments that are designed as mixed-use districts can reduce the trip generation on the roadway system compared to the similar single-use development and can also provide for a greater variety of housing and work locations within the community. This development type can take many different urban forms, from higher intensity mixed-use focusing on office and retail (typical of an urban downtown) to primarily residential developments with an integrated mix of single and multi-family residential with some live-work units and neighborhood retail (typical of a new urbanism or TND development).



Neighborhood retail includes convenience retail that people use everyday, such as corner stores, cafes, video stores, pizza shops, and other businesses that cater to daily needs and encourage repeat business. In mixed-use developments, neighborhood retail is designed in such a way that residents can return from work, park the car, and

have the *choice* to complete at least some of their daily travels on foot.

Within the College Station City limits, there exist a number of large vacant tracts. Opportunities exist to have these sites, as appropriate, develop as Master Planned Developments. Some of these developments could include mixed-use districts or sites that serve the local area. Future Master Planned Developments should be viewed as an appropriate opportunity for mixed-use, but mixed-use need not be a required component of all Master Planned Developments. Current land use regulations provide zoning options for all types of Master Planned Developments, which could be developed in areas designated for mixed-use.

Concluding Remarks

Three types of mixed-use development opportunities have been identified for College Station. The first is **Historic Mixed Use**, which primarily includes the Northgate area and accommodates a mix of residential and small-scale retail and office uses. The second type is **Single Use Conversion**, which includes the conversion of retail strip malls and shopping centers to mixed retail/office and/or residential developments that incorporate a pedestrian friendly redesign and are integrated with adjacent neighborhoods. The final opportunity for mixed-use development is with **Master Planned Developments**, which can be developed on large vacant tracts and focus on either office and retail, with limited residential, or focus on residential with neighborhood retail and/or live-work units as in a "Traditional Neighborhood Development".

Pursuing any of these types of mixed-use developments will provide alternative living, working and shopping opportunities in the community. They can reduce the need to expand utility infrastructure and services to accommodate future growth. In addition, they can reduce demand for new roadways given the same amount of commercial and residential developed as single uses.

Recommendations

This section makes recommendations for specific areas of College Station. Included are areas that are currently labeled Mixed-Use on the Land Use Plan.

General Recommendations

The City's Land Use Plan is used to determine the preferred land uses for properties in the City. Since the current plan was adopted in 1997, land designated for mixed-use on the Land Use Plan has not developed as such. Experience shows us that mixed-use development is not common or always feasible in our market, and it's unlikely that attempts to force mixed-use development through the Land Use Plan designations would be successful in the near future. In addition, there do not appear to be any areas in the City (with the exception of Northgate) where mixed-use is considered the only desirable development pattern. Therefore, mixed-use is not an appropriate category for the Land Use Plan at this time.

This does not mean that mixed-use development is not desirable or that it should not be allowed or encouraged. This report identified three types of mixed-use development that are appropriate for College Station (Historic, Single-use Conversions, & Master Planned Developments). None of these three types require a mixed-use designation on the Land Use Plan to be implemented. Therefore, it is recommended that the City have a policy that allows for and encourages mixed-use development, but should not force it to occur in any specific location through the Land Use Plan. This means removing the mixed-use designation from the Land Use Plan, and replacing it with other designations that better represent the desired uses and development patterns. The UDO does provide zoning options for Single-Use Conversions and Master Planned Developments. In summary, this approach provides for mixed-use development should a developer or the market desire it without forcing it to occur where the market does not support it or where it may not be the only desirable land use pattern.

It is also recommended that a new land use category called Planned Development be added to the land use plan. This is to be used where larger areas of land may develop with a mix, or collection, of uses, but not necessarily a mixed-use pattern. The Planned Development category emphasizes the need to master plan the area to ensure appropriate placement

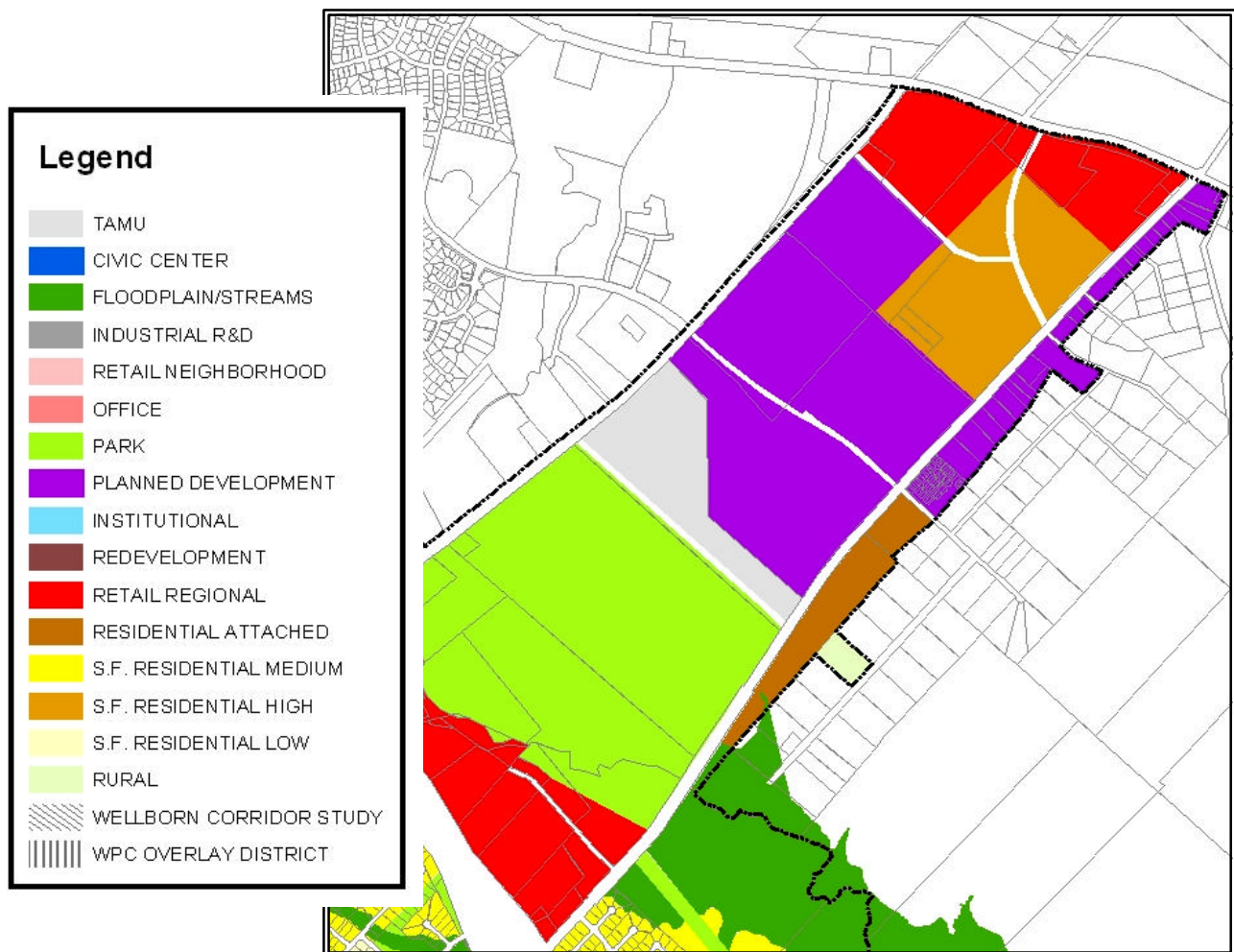
of different uses. The PDD zoning districts may be the best approach to zoning for development in these areas. The approach provides maximum flexibility for the market and developer while ensuring a compatible pattern of uses.

The following pages contain more detailed descriptions of the recommendations and maps that show the proposed amendments to the Land Use Plan.

The 30/60 Area

The 30/60 Area Plan was adopted in 2001 and makes plans for development occurring in the area including Veterans Park and the Hotel Conference Center. Mixed-use was shown in this area to accommodate the variety of uses that might develop around the conference center use. The plan specifically outlines which uses are preferred. Mixed-use development, as defined in this report, is not specifically the type of development described. In addition, there appears to be no intention to require mixed-use development in this area. Instead, the intention is to seek a Master Planned Development that may contain a collection of different uses. Therefore, *this report recommends that the Land Use Plan be changed from Mixed-use to Planned Development in the 30/60 area.*

Proposed Land Use Plan



East Bypass Corridor

Several tracts along the East Bypass were shown as Mixed-use when the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1997. This was reviewed and refined during development of the East Bypass Small Area Plan in 2000. At that time, PDD's were being used to mitigate the impacts of infill development and the East Bypass Plan called for the use of PDD's everywhere that Mixed-use was shown on the Plan. As a result, the Mixed-use designation actually meant Planned Development and not necessarily a mixed-use development pattern. Since that Plan was adopted, the City has changed its policy and ordinance regarding the use of PDD's, making this approach obsolete.

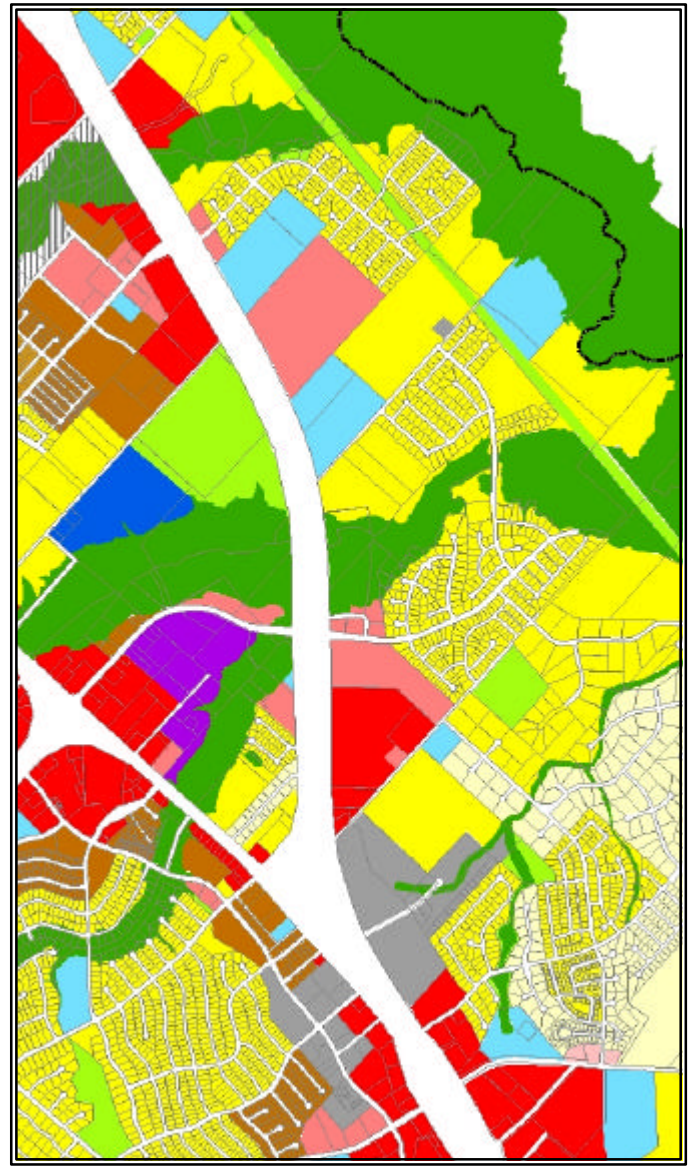
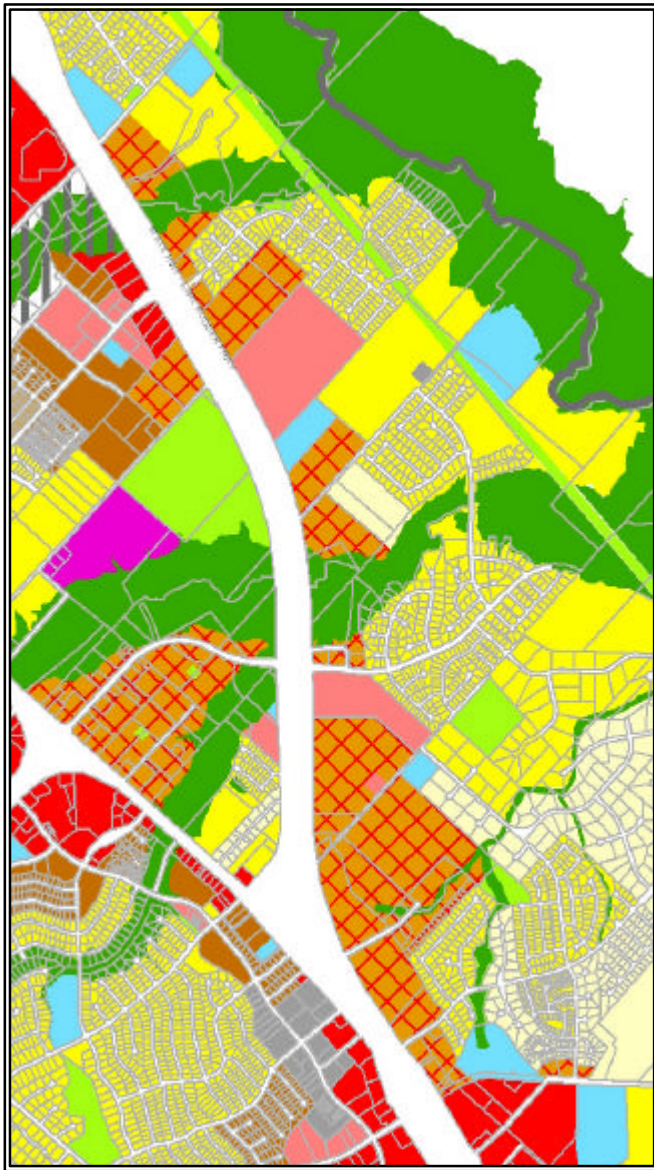
A review of current zoning in the area shows that most of these tracts are already zoned for development and it is not likely that the City will be able to change that. *It is recommended that these tracts be shown for land uses in line with their current zoning.*

For those properties that are labeled mixed-use and have not been zoned for development, the Land Use Plan should be changed to reflect uses that comply as much as possible with the East Bypass Plan.

The maps on the following page show the current and proposed Land Use Plans for this area and proposed changes for properties labeled mixed-use (shown as a hatched pattern on the current Land Use Plan).

Current Land Use Plan

Proposed Land Use Plan



Legend

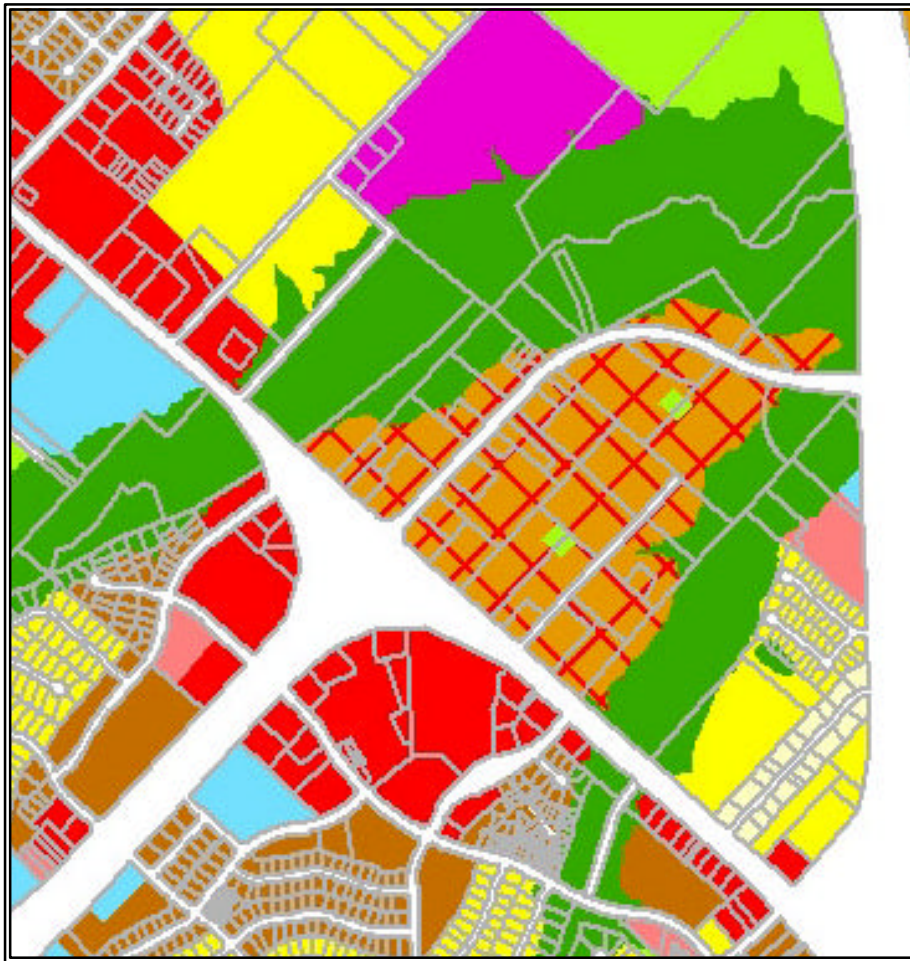
- TAMU
- CIVIC CENTER
- FLOODPLAIN/STREAMS
- INDUSTRIAL R&D
- RETAIL NEIGHBORHOOD
- OFFICE
- PARK
- PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

- INSTITUTIONAL
- REDEVELOPMENT
- RETAIL REGIONAL
- RESIDENTIAL ATTACHED
- S.F. RESIDENTIAL MEDIUM
- S.F. RESIDENTIAL HIGH
- S.F. RESIDENTIAL LOW
- RURAL
- WELLBORN CORRIDOR STUDY
- WPC OVERLAY DISTRICT

Harvey Mitchell Parkway between Texas Ave. and Highway 6

A review of current zoning in the area shows that some of these tracts are already zoned for commercial development and it's not likely that the City will be able to change that. Several tracts in this area are also already developed. However, there is considerable land still undeveloped. The emphasis in this area is to encourage a variety of compatible developments and uses. Therefore, *this report recommends that the Land Use Plan be changed from Mixed-use to Planned Development for the large area of vacant tracts and that developed tracts be shown for land uses in line with their current zoning.*

Current Land Use Plan:



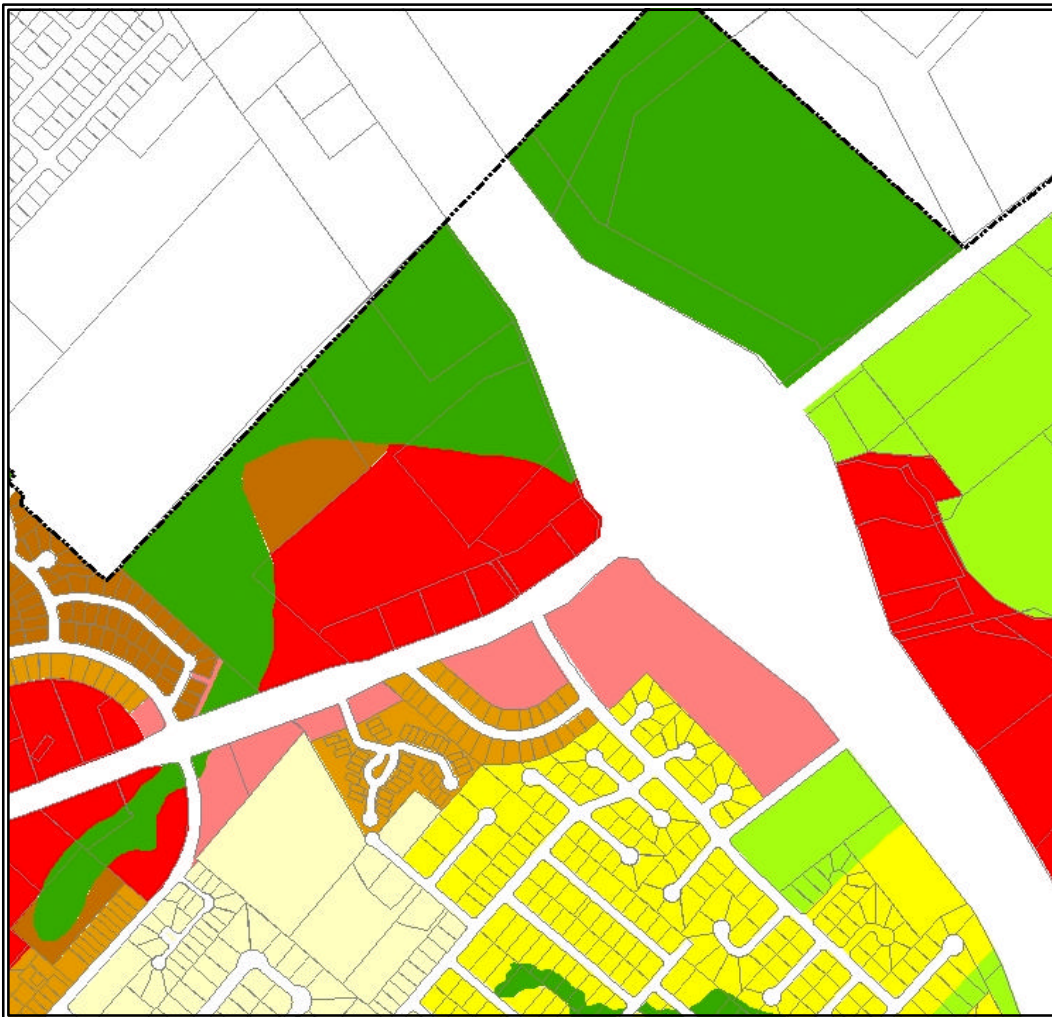
Proposed Land Use Plan:



University Drive Gateway

This area on the north side of University Drive was originally designated as mixed-use when the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1997. It included a combination of properties zoned for commercial and multi-family uses. This combined with its general location made it a good location for some mixed-used development. However the area has mostly developed with single-use developments. *It is recommended that the Land Use Plan be changed to represent the area as a combination of commercial and multi-family as this is how the area is currently developing.*

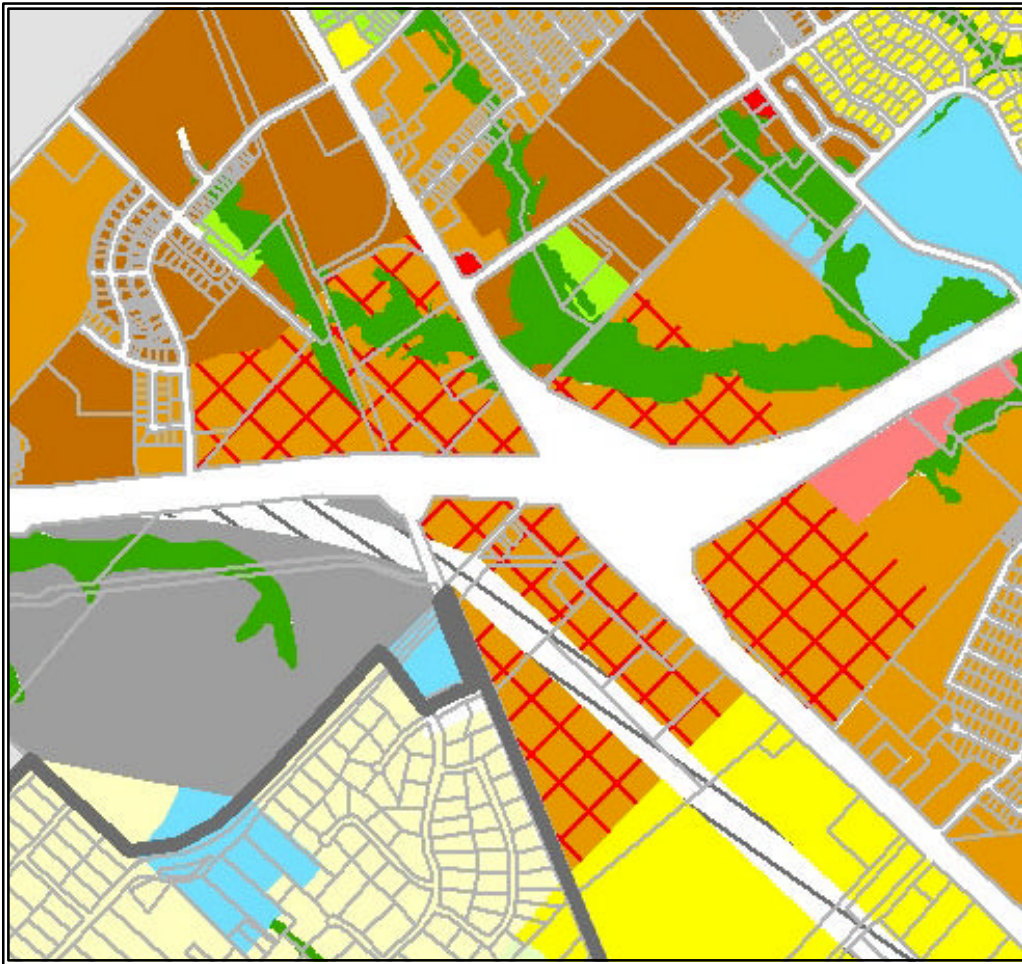
Proposed Land Use Plan:



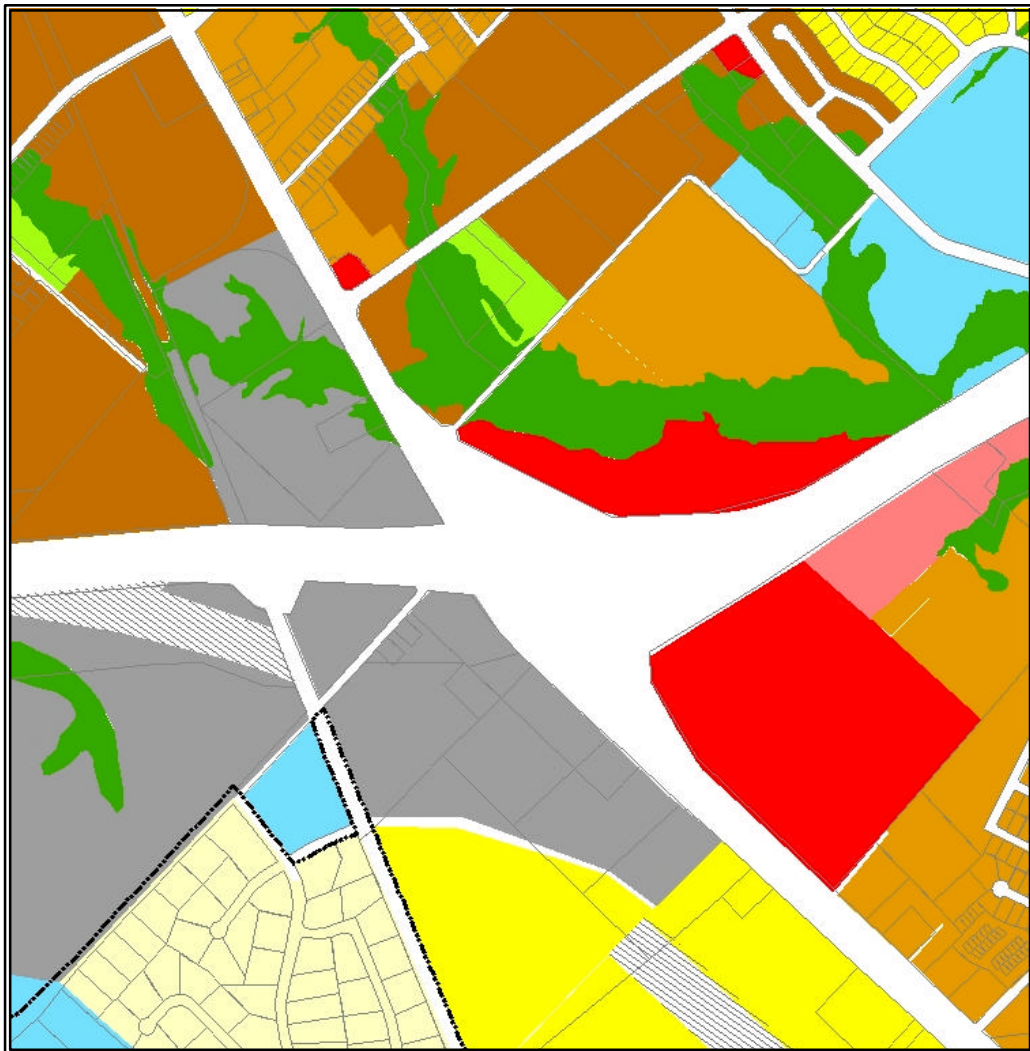
Intersection of Wellborn Road and Harvey Mitchell Parkway

The four corners of this intersection were shown for mixed-use development when the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1997. Two of the corners have C-1 zoning and will likely develop with commercial uses. The southwestern corner was changed with adoption of the Wellborn / I&GN Triangle Plan. *This report recommends that the mixed-use areas (shown as hatched pattern) be changed as shown on the following maps:*

Current Land Use Plan:



Proposed Land Use Plan:



Legend

TAMU	INSTITUTIONAL
CIVIC CENTER	REDEVELOPMENT
FLOODPLAIN/STREAMS	RETAIL REGIONAL
INDUSTRIAL R&D	RESIDENTIAL ATTACHED
RETAIL NEIGHBORHOOD	S.F. RESIDENTIAL MEDIUM
OFFICE	S.F. RESIDENTIAL HIGH
PARK	S.F. RESIDENTIAL LOW
PLANNED DEVELOPMENT	RURAL
	WELLBORN CORRIDOR STUDY
	WPC OVERLAY DISTRICT